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Chin's Last Letter to Wife Ordinary Note, Son Says

Jail Official Details Spy's Last Morning

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Convicted spy Larry Wu-Tai Chin's last letter to his family was not a suicide note, his son Homer said yesterday. The letter, addressed to Chin's wife Cathy, was given to the family after it was translated and examined for national security information.

"It was just another letter just like many others she had received" from her husband, said Homer Chin.

Officials of Prince William-Manassas Regional Adult Detention Center where Chin was awaiting sentencing for his Feb. 7 conviction on espionage, conspiracy and tax evasion charges, repeated yesterday that they had no indication that he intended to kill himself and called him "a model prisoner."

In a news conference, Maj. Alred Britts, director of operations at the jail, described in detail the hours before Chin was found dead in his cell:

After a breakfast of bacon, pan-

cakes and juice at 6:30 a.m., Chin reminded a jail worker that the wastebasket in the common room Chin shared with other prisoners needed to be emptied before inspection.

The inspections are conducted three times a week, Britts said, and prisoners earn extra privileges if their rooms pass inspection.

At 7:15 a.m., the worker emptied the wastebasket and passed a clean trashcan liner to Chin through the food slot in the door to the common room, Britts said. Chin apparently took the bag and went to his cell, Britts said.

At a 7:30 a.m. prisoner check, Chin was observed lying on his bed, but his head was obscured from view by a commode and sink next to his bunk. During an 8 a.m. count of prisoners, Chin was on his bed and an officer saw his leg move.

Around 8:40, in anticipation of the 9:30 a.m. inspection, an officer told an inmate sharing the common room with Chin to get him out of bed to start cleaning up. The officer left the common room and, when he

returned a few minutes later, the inmate told him he had not been able to arouse Chin by knocking on his locked cell door.

The doors are kept locked most of the time and can be opened electronically only by a jail officer.

The officer then went into Chin's cell and found him under a blanket with the plastic garbage bag tied around his head with shoelaces. Chin's body was still warm, officials said, and they immediately tried to revive him.

Chin requested the high-top sneakers from which he took the shoelaces on Feb. 9 and they were delivered to him Feb. 13, officials said.

Jail officials said Chin had not told his wife during a visit two nights before he died that he was upset and he had told the jail's chaplain he would attend a Bible study Friday night.

When Chin was questioned 11 days before he died about another prisoner's report that he had threatened to commit suicide after his sentencing, he denied it. "He kind of laughed about it," said jail superintendent Stephan Kaftan.

"He was a model prisoner," said Kaftan. "He behaved, he obeyed the rules and if he did something wrong he was very apologetic." Chin played cards and table tennis with other prisoners and sometimes sang hymns in his cell, Britts said.

Chin's family said his funeral would be held in Alexandria today.